

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
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ALL OTHER CANADIAN POSTS (BY POUCH)

C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 05420

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, CA
SUBJECT: FEDERAL PAPER ON LANGUAGE POLICY A CAUTIOUS
STATEMENT

1. SUMMARY: FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S LANGUAGE POLICY PAPER, TABLED IN COMMONS JUNE 21, REAFFIRMS POLICY OF LINGUISTIC EQUALITY AND CONTAINS LANGUAGE WHICH COULD BE SEEN AS DIRECT CHALLENGE TO QUEBEC'S BILL ONE. SECRETARY OF STATE ROBERTS, HOWEVER, EXPLICITLY BACKED AWAY FROM SUCH A CHALLENGE IN PRESS CONFERENCE EXPLAINING PAPER. MEDIA ATTENTION FOCUSED ON THIS FAILURE TO CHALLENGE BILL ONE WITH ELEMENTS OF PAPER GIVEN ONLY PASSING NOTICE. END SUMMARY.

2. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LANGUAGE POLICY STATEMENT TABLED IN COMMONS JUNE 21. GENERAL THRUST OF PAPER TO CONVINCE ALL CANADIANS, ANGLOPHONE AND FRANCOPHONE ALIKE, OF NEED FOR A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY IN WHICH BOTH LANGUAGES FLOURISH. IN THIS REGARD, IT PLEDGES FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO WORK WITH PROVINCES IN EXTENDING RIGHTS OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH MINORITIES ACROSS CANADA, INCLUDING CREATION OF MINORITY LANGUAGE SCHOOLS. PAPER CAREFULLY AVOIDS
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CREATING IMPRESSION OF FEDERAL FIAT BY NOTING, "TO SAY THIS IS NOT TO ATTEMPT TO TELL THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS WHAT THEY SHOULD DO." EMPHASIS, RATHER, IS ON FEDERAL WILLINGNESS TO DISCUSS AND COOPERATE WITH PROVINCES, EVEN SUGGESTING POSSIBILITY OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ASSUMING "A DIRECT CONSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY" IN MATTER IF PROVINCES SO DESIRE.

3. MEDIA ATTENTION HAS FOCUSED NOT SURPRISINGLY ON PAPER'S IMPACT ON QUEBEC AND PARTICULARLY PROVISIONS OF PARTI QUEBECOIS'S (PQ) BILL ONE. PAPER STATES THAT "CANADIANS HAVE A RIGHT TO HAVE THEIR CHILDREN EDUCATED IN THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THEIR CHOICE." STATEMENT ALONE WOULD BE DIRECT CHALLENGE TO BILL ONE. THIS RIGHT, HOWEVER, QUALIFIED IN TWO RESPECTS: "SUBJECT TO CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MAY MAKE A DEFERMENT OF APPLICATION NECESSARY" AND "...THE NECESSARY FACILITIES SHOULD BE PROVIDED WHEREVER NUMBERS WARRANT."

4. IN PRESS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING TABLING OF PAPER, SEC OF STATE JOHN ROBERTS EXPLICITLY BACKED OFF FROM OTTAWA CHALLENGE TO BILL ONE. CITING THE "CONSIDERABLE INSECURITY" ABOUT THE STATE OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE IN QUEBEC, ROBERTS SAID FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WILL RELUCTANTLY GO ALONG WITH PQ GOVERNMENTS RESTRICTIONS ON THE FREEDOM OF CHOICE IN THE LANGUAGE OF EDUCATION, "IN THE SHORT TERM." HE REFUSED TO DEFINE WHAT HE MEANT BY "SHORT TERM." HIS COMMENTS ELICITED GLOBE AND MAIL HEADLINE, "OTTAWA WILL ACCEPT PQ'S LANGUAGE LAW."

5. OPPOSITION COMMENT CAUTIOUSLY WELCOMED REAFFIRMATION OF LINGUISTIC EQUALITY BUT POINTED OUT THAT PAPER "10 YEARS LATE," IN PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE (PC) LEADER JOE CONFIDENTIAL

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CLARK'S WORDS, AND LACKING IN SPECIFICITY, ACCORDING TO NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP) LEADER ED BROADBENT.

6. COMMENT: SOMETHING MAY COME OF FEDERAL OFFER TO COOPERATE WITH PROVINCES IN PROVIDING MORE SECOND-LANGUAGE EDUCATION BUT, IT SEEMS TO US, GLOBE AND MAIL HEADLINE AND SIMILAR MEDIA ATTENTION IS WHAT WILL REGISTER WITH PEOPLE ACROSS CANADA. PAPER WILL BE SEEN BY PUBLIC AS OTTAWA VACILLATION BEFORE A PQ GOVERNMENT WHICH CANNOT BE FAULTED FOR LACK OF DECISIVENESS. ENDERS

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